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April 13, 2011

Members of the Michigan House Committee on Transportation:

I am writing in support of House Bill 4533 that will allow teens with a Level 2 driver's license to drive to and from school-sanctioned events after 10:00 pm. I am the parent of a 20 year old college sophomore daughter and a 16 year old high school sophomore son. Many students in high school are involved in after-school activities such as band, drama, sports, volunteer work, etc that necessitate a return to the school in the evening after 10:00 pm. We experienced this first when our daughter was in high school and who, as an Honors Student, was involved in several activities of this nature. Our son is also an Honors Student and is involved in high school soccer, band, and lacrosse. It is not unusual for him to drive himself to school in the morning, get on a bus immediately after school for a game an hour away, and arrive back at the school after 10:00 pm. With the current legislation, we are obligated to go pick him up at the school, which involves both parents so that the car can also be returned home for the next days' use. It seems that allowing students to return home after 10:00 pm from school-sanctioned events is a common sense change.

I am less in favor of the change to the current legislation to allow for multiple unrelated people under the age of 21 to be passengers in the car of a Level 2 driver related to his employment. I understand that some teens have jobs as "drivers" of unrelated children for after-school activities, but I believe that multiple passengers in a car is a larger problem for new drivers than the hour of the day. I believe that any additional distraction in the car increases the possibility of inattention to the task at hand and an accident. We simply have a rule in our house that only one passenger is ever allowed, with limited exception and advance permission.

Although I understand it is not currently the subject of this legislation, I would also like to take this opportunity to express my opinion about the 10:00 pm curfew in general. I feel that while midnight may have been a little too late for new drivers to be on the road, I feel that 10:00 pm is a little early for curfew. I believe that 11:00 p.m. would have been a more reasonable compromise, and in fact may have alleviated many of the concerns about school-related events; in my experience it is not uncommon for a team/band/drama crew to be out past 10:00, but rare for them to be out past 11:00. In general, 10:00 pm seems too early for a car to be "grounded," especially on a sunny Saturday evening in June when it's still light outside and a 17 year old is trying to get his date home from an 8:00 movie. In our son's words, "That 10:00 curfew just encourages rushing." The curfew can't be related to darkness, because after all, it is dark at 5:30 pm in the winter,

and still light at 10:00 pm in the summer! And while you and I may be tired at 10:00 pm, these kids are definitely not!

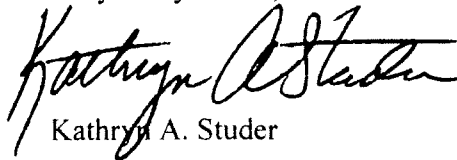
I have many friends who are also responsible parents of new teen drivers, and we were discussing the curfew and the pending legislation last night after our soccer game. While they may not have time to write to you before the hearing today they were all of the opinion that the 10:00 pm curfew is too early, and simply inconveniences the law abiding parents of "good kids." The irresponsible parents out there will simply look the other way or may not even be aware that the law has changed. With the 10:00 curfew, it puts the responsible parents back in the business of driving our kids to and from events that are unrelated to school or employment, yet are still worthwhile and "normal" activities for kids this age. My son, for instance, is training for his 3rd degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do. Some of his classes are at the adult level and take place at 9pm. Some teen church activities also extend past 10:00 pm, as well as "club" sports that involved travel, such as soccer, softball/baseball, swimming/diving, etc. For us to be driving these kids back and forth to these activities simply because they extend past 10:00 pm seems completely unreasonable, especially when you consider that some Level 2 drivers are as old as 17-1/2 ! I can't believe that the difference in one (or even two) hours in the curfew will make a noticeable difference in the accident rate in this age group. Again, the number of passengers in a vehicle seems much more highly correlated to accident rate. Further, with the cuts in law enforcement across the state, you'll be busying your officers with trying to establish if that Level 2 driver is on his way to or from "employment", or a school-related activity, or some other activity. This is after he checks to see if the other two kids in the car are his relatives.

I support proposed House Bill 4533, but even more, I believe the Committee should go back to the drawing board and take a look at the legislation overall with respect to the curfew provisions. The current curfew law seems to be unnecessarily restrictive, inconvenient to law-abiding parents, and I believe will have little effect on accident rates.

Thank you for allowing me to express my opinion about this Bill as it goes before you go for a vote. I look forward to finding out the results in the days ahead.

Please feel free to contact me if you wish to discuss anything further with regard to this matter.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kathryn A. Studer', written in a cursive style.

Kathryn A. Studer